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SUBJECT: PRT WASIT: PRINCE RABIA LOOKS AFTER HIS TRIBE, BUT
LONGS FOR THE "GOLDEN ERA"

Classified By: 09 Baghdad 3332

11. (U) This is a PRT Wasit reporting cable.

12. (S) SUMMARY: During a discussion with Wasit PRT members at his palace west of FOB Delta, Prince Rabia Mohammed Al Habeeb of the mixed Shia/Sunni Rabia Tribal Federation expounded on Iraq,s agricultural problems, and the hypocrisy of religious leaders. Habeeb maintained that tribal ties remain an essential social safety net for both urban and rural Iraqis. He was most passionate about the migration of poor farmers away from the surrounding areas because of declining water levels. Despite his son's political ambitions as a candidate for parliament, the patriarch of a main branch of the Hashemi family severely criticized the performance of elected officials and the current structure of the Iraqi government. Prince Rabia stated unequivocally several times during the discussion that &Iraq is not ready for democracy.8 END SUMMARY

13. (SBU) Prince Rabia Mohammed Al Habeeb, leader of one of Iraq,s largest tribal confederations, invited PRToffs to visit him at his palace in Al-Ahrar, 10 kms west of FOB Delta, to discuss the Al-Hahwar canal and pump station. The town of about 24,000 is the historic home of the Rabia line. Habeeb expressed serious concern about the dire shortage of water available for irrigation in recent years. As a result of dry conditions in areas along the farthest edges of irrigation networks, poor farmers have begun to migrate to urban areas seeking work. Habeeb complained that many of his tribesmen are desperately poor and constantly seek alms from him. On any given day, he said, a dozen women will be lined up outside his palace with cooking pots, seeking food for their families.

14. (C) When pressed to offer an assessment of the provincial and national government,s response to worsening agricultural conditions, Rabia embarked on a lengthy diatribe against the current government. Although hesitant to speak openly about either the Provincial Council Chairman Mahmud Abd Al-Rida Talal (aka Haiji Mahmud-ISCI)or the Governor Latif Tarfah (Independent), he was skeptical when the Team Leader suggested that new revenues from fees collected at the waiting area near the Zurbatiyah Point of Entry may help augment an otherwise penurious provincial capital budget (Reftel). Rabia was more explicit when asked about the Council of Representatives, asserting that they were all &criminals . . . with no thought of the needs of the common Iraqi.8 Reminding his audience that the Rabia tribe had &kicked the Persians out of Iraq," he claimed that the current government has too many &traitors8 willing to accept money to do a foreign government,s bidding. Harking back to a more peaceful era, Rabia reminisced that Iraq enjoyed its golden period under the monarchy. Speculating about Iraq,s prospects following the withdrawal of U.S. forces, he noted sardonically, &When you leave out one door, I,ll be going out the other.8

16. (C) Rabia had similarly hostile feelings about Iraq,s religious parties and leaders, railing against their complicity in &foreign interference.8 Complaining of the constant whining of imams in Al-Ahrar,s four mosques, he

denounced the hypocrisy of religious leaders who feign piety but who he alleged are guilty of murder and rape. He also criticized Shi'a followers for their exaggerated self-mutilation during Ashura and wondered how Iraq could become a productive country with so many distractions. Linking his earlier point about the erosion of social unity, Rabia said that unemployed youth become less willing to follow tribal guidance and more likely to fall prey to religious extremists in urban areas. (COMMENT: The Al-Ahrar-Numaniyah route has been the scene of numerous IED and small-arms fire attacks against ISF and USF in recent months. In November 2009, a soldier escorting a PRT mission was shot by a sniper in Numaniyah, approximately 10 miles west of Al-Ahrar. END COMMENT)

17. (SBU) Prince Rabia, son, also named Muhammad, deferred to his father for most of the conversation. In a side conversation with the PRT, he mentioned his political activities as leader of the Al Fursan Party (the "Knights" or "Fighters"), part of the PM, State of Law Alliance (SLA). He expressed confidence in his party's ability to obtain sufficient votes to secure him a seat on the Council of Representatives in March. (COMMENT: Based on the elder Rabia, following in Wasit, the PRT believes his son will easily muster the votes necessary to secure a CoR seat. END COMMENT)

18. (SBU) COMMENT: While PRT Wasit has engaged primarily with elected and appointed officials rather than tribal leaders (in part because of relatively weaker tribal influence in conventional party politics in the province), Habeeb clearly holds sway with a huge segment of Wasit's population. Despite his 79 years, he remains a vigorous and charismatic leader. In contrast to traditional PRT contacts like democratically elected officials, Rabia may offer a more

street-savvy perspective about how those officials are performing. It is not unusual for a prince to maintain a skeptical view of democratic institutions and to pine for the days before his influence began to wane. There is pragmatism, however, and the generational shift in attitude is apparent as the son--and future Prince--throws his hat into the political ring. END COMMENT.

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